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Adoption of the agenda and organization of work

Science and technology for development

Letter dated 15 may 1998 from the Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

I should like to request that item 95 (c) of the agenda of the fifty-second session of the General Assembly be reopened to consider the implications of the year 2000 date conversion problem for computers. An explanatory memorandum and a draft resolution on the issue are annexed.

I would also request that the present letter and its annexes be circulated as a document of the General Assembly and that the matter may be considered directly in plenary meeting during the current session of the General Assembly.

(*Signed*) Ahmad **Kamal**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex I

Explanatory memorandum

As the year 2000 draws nearer, the challenge of addressing the year 2000 date conversion problem for computers, also known as the "millennium bug" or "Y2K", is assuming greater and genuine urgency.

The Y2K problem arises from the fact that older computer systems use chips and software which recognize only the last two digits of the year and not all four digits taken together. As a result the year 2000 and beyond will be read as the year 1900 onwards. This was done by early programmers to save storage space and to simplify calculations. While it was assumed that the older programmes would be retired prior to the 1990s, it happens that many still remain in use in various parts of the world. This software will not work properly from 1 January 2000 unless remedial action is taken before 31 December 1999.

While the deadline is totally inflexible, the task of tackling the millennium bug is time-consuming and requires technical expertise as well as financial resources. Once remedial action has been taken, extensive testing is required to ensure that all potential failures have been found and that the compliance process itself has not introduced new bugs into the system.

The Y2K problem has enormous implications for all the activities dependent on electronic systems all over the world. It will affect computer systems and electronic control equipment containing embedded chips and internal clocks. If not corrected in time, the millennium bug will affect vital areas such as power supplies, telecommunications, financial systems, transport, public health, building and factory systems, food supplies, emergency services, the organization of social welfare and utilities. This will have enormous impact on the economies of all countries.

Additionally, regardless of what a country may do to avert problems within its own borders, it can still be adversely affected by the Y2K omissions of other countries. The examples are international telecommunications, banking and transportation. The problem demands collective and coordinated action, as individual solutions run the risk of being incompatible. All countries, therefore, need to achieve year 2000 compliance. Anything less would have consequences for the individual countries that fail to do so, and have a negative impact on those that achieve compliance in time.

In view of the global implications of the Y2K problem, the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Informatics of the Economic and Social Council and its Technical Sub-Group, which I have the honour to chair, have kept the issue constantly under review. All possible efforts are being made to ensure that all critical areas in the United Nations system are year 2000 compliant in sufficient time. Efforts are also being made to help Member States to address the Y2K challenge. A profile of the problem was prepared and transmitted to all Missions with a view to alerting Member States to all its implications and repercussions. A special Web Page has been established for this purpose. Moreover, the informatics workshop, organized by the Working Group on Informatics on 11 May 1998 at United Nations Headquarters, focused entirely on the Y2K challenge.

In view of the serious threats posed by the year 2000 date conversion problem for computers and the global nature of the challenge, it would serve the interests of all Member States to consider the issue urgently and adopt a resolution by consensus in the General Assembly. This would further enhance awareness of the problem and facilitate preparedness for addressing the challenge. This would also pave the way for global cooperation for addressing the global challenge posed by the Y2K.

Annex II

Draft resolution

Global implications of the year 2000 date conversion problem for computers

The General Assembly,

Recognizing that the effective operation of Governments, companies and other organizations is threatened by the year 2000 date conversion problem for computers or "millennium bug",

Underlining the need for effective action to address the problem to be taken well in advance of the inflexible date of 31 December 1999, beyond which important systems might cease to function,

Recognizing the potentially serious impact that the year 2000 problem could have in all countries whose economies are increasingly interdependent,

Emphasizing that the year 2000 problem could affect both computer systems and much electronic control equipment containing embedded chips and internal clocks, with wide-ranging effects on such important areas as power supplies, telecommunications, financial systems, transport, public health, building and factory systems, food supplies, emergency services, the organization of social welfare and utilities,

Emphasizing also that coordinated efforts by Governments and private, public and international organizations are required to address the year 2000 problem,

Appreciating the establishment of a Trust Fund by the World Bank to assist in the efforts to resolve the year 2000 problem and the voluntary contributions made to it by the member States,

Appreciating the efforts of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Informatics of the Economic and Social Council in raising the level of awareness of the year 2000 problem,

1. *Requests* all Member States to attach a high priority to raising the level of awareness, both by ensuring that the private sector is fully engaged in addressing the year 2000 problem and by tackling the problem in those systems within their own control, and to consider, *inter alia*, the appointment of a nationwide coordinator for this purpose;

2. *Appeals* to all Member States to forge global cooperation to ensure a timely and effective response to the year 2000 challenge;

3. *Calls upon* Governments, public and private sector organizations and civil society to share locally, regionally and globally their experiences in addressing the year 2000 problem;

4. *Requests* the Secretary-General to take steps to ensure that all parts of the United Nations system take measures to ensure that their computers and equipment with embedded microprocessors are year 2000 compliant well before the target date, and to put a mechanism in place to monitor actions and compliance;

5. *Calls upon* the Economic and Social Council to prepare at its substantive session of 1998 a United Nations plan of action incorporating guidelines on which Member States will be able to draw in addressing the diverse aspects of the year 2000 problem;

6. *Requests* the Secretary-General to ensure that the United Nations system closely monitors actual and potential sources of funding to support the efforts of the developing countries to address the year 2000 problem, and to facilitate the dissemination of relevant information on those funding possibilities to the Member States;

7. *Requests* the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at its fifty-third session on the steps taken within the United Nations system and with Member States to resolve this problem;

8. *Decides* to include in the provisional agenda of its fifty-third session an item entitled "Global implications of the year 2000 date conversion problem for computers".